
The United Nations cultural agency, UNESCO, says more than a third of the world's six thousand languages are in danger of extinction. Of those two thousand, it says, about two hundred are spoken by only a handful of people. Leonardo Rocha reports:

When a language dies, UNESCO says the world loses **valuable cultural heritage** - a **great deal of** the **legends**, poems and the knowledge gathered by generations is simply lost. In 2008, Alaska's last **native speaker of** Eyak died, taking the language with her.

Marie Smith Jones praying in Eyak

Chief Marie Smith Jones, praying here for the survival of the Eyaks. She died at the age of eighty-nine, **campaigning** to save her people's heritage.

UNESCO says government action is needed if the world is **to preserve its linguistic diversity**. People must be proud to speak their language to ensure it survives.

In the last five years, the governments of Mexico, New Zealand and the United States managed **to reverse the trend** locally. But UNESCO says the phenomenon of dying languages appears in every region and in very diverse economic conditions.

Leonardo Rocha, BBC

Vocabulary and definitions

UNESCO	short for the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
valuable cultural heritage	features belonging to a particular society, such as traditions, languages, buildings or works of art, which still exist from the past, are unique and therefore have a historical importance
a great deal of	many, a lot of
legends	old stories presented as history but unlikely to be true
native speaker of	someone whose first language, or mother tongue, is
campaigning	taking action aimed at achieving a goal
to preserve its linguistic diversity	to save the great number of languages currently spoken
to reverse the trend	here, to make sure people are encouraged to speak rare languages, so those languages can survive

More on this story: <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/asia-pacific/7225570.stm>

Read and listen to the story and the vocabulary online:

http://www.bbc.co.uk/worldservice/learningenglish/language/wordsinthenews/2009/04/090504_witn_languages.shtml